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WATERS OF CREATION - MUDUNGKALA AND THE GREAT FLOODS ACROSS CULTURES

Abstract

The Tiwi Islands, comprising Bathurst and Melville Islands, hold profound significance in Aboriginal mythology, with their origins attributed to the ancestral creator Mudungkala. As described in Tiwi creation stories, Mudungkala, a blind elderly woman, emerged during the Dreamtime (Palaneri) and shaped the islands by traversing the barren landscape with her three children. Her journey, marked by the creation of waterways such as the Clarence and Dundas Straits and the Apsley Strait, introduced vital resources like fresh water, vegetation, and animals, ensuring the land's capacity to sustain life. This narrative intriguingly aligns with geological evidence of rising sea levels following the last Ice Age, approximately 8,200 to 9,650 years ago—a period coinciding with global flood myths, such as those of Mesopotamia and Greece, as well as the speculated submergence of Atlantis.

Mudungkala's story transcends its mythological origins, intertwining ecological transformation with spiritual symbolism. Comparable to figures like Quetzalcoatl, Thoth, and Huangdi, Mudungkala embodies themes of nurture, renewal, and the creation of sustainable environments. Her narrative reflects the Tiwi people's enduring connection to their environment, highlighting their understanding of ecological change and the interconnectedness of all life forms. Preserved through oral tradition, this creation myth remains a cornerstone of Tiwi cultural identity, illustrating the integration of spiritual beliefs and ecological observations in shaping a distinct cultural heritage.

The Tiwi Islands, comprising Bathurst and Melville Islands, are steeped in Aboriginal mythology. According to Tiwi creation stories, the genesis of these islands is attributed to a blind elderly woman named Mudungkala. As the world was forming during the "Palaneri" or Dreaming phase, Mudungkala emerged from the earth, carrying her three children. Crawling on her knees, she traversed the land, leaving a trail of fresh water in her wake. This journey is said to have created the Clarence and Dundas Straits, which separate the islands from mainland Australia. She also formed the Apsley Strait, dividing Bathurst and Melville Islands, and covered the barren land with vegetation and animals for her children before vanishing.

This myth aligns intriguingly with geological and ecological evidence. The Tiwi Islands were once connected to mainland Australia but became isolated due to rising sea levels at the end of the last Ice Age. This inundation occurred approximately 8,200 to 9,650 years ago, coinciding with The Great Flood depicted by many ancient (and current) historians of ancient Mesopotamia, India, and Greece. Notably the submergence of Atlantis occurred during this time.

The Tiwi people have preserved this narrative through generations, mixing spiritual beliefs with ecological observations. Their culture, language, and traditions remain distinct, shaped by their island environment and isolation from mainland Australia.

The central figure in the Tiwi creation story is Mudungkala, an ancestral being deeply revered by the Tiwi people. She is described as a blind elderly woman who emerged from the distant waters during the Dreamtime, or Palaneri. Mudungkala's role as the creator is pivotal: she shaped the land, created waterways, and ensured that life could flourish on the islands by providing vegetation and animals (Much like Quetzalcoatl and the Aztecs, Thoth and the Egyptians, Huangdi The Yellow Emperor and Chinese. Most arrived by water and all reshaped and rebuilt society in their respective regions).

Symbolically, Mudungkala represents nurture, transformation, and the profound connection between the Tiwi people and their environment. Her journey is not only a spiritual tale but also an ecological narrative, reflecting a time of dramatic change in the landscape.

Mudungkala is a foundational figure in the Tiwi people's creation mythology. As the ancestral creator, she plays a deeply symbolic and spiritual role in their lore. Emerging from the earth during the Dreamtime (Palaneri), she is depicted as an elderly woman—wise, nurturing, and purposeful in her journey.

According to the Tiwi story, Mudungkala's mission was to shape and sustain the world for her children and their descendants. She is believed to have traveled across the barren land, crawling on her knees while carrying her three children. As she moved, she left behind streams of fresh water, creating the waterways that today define the Tiwi Islands, such as the Clarence and Dundas Straits and the

Apsley Strait. These paths not only gave life to the land but also formed the geographical separations that distinguish Bathurst and Melville Islands from mainland Australia. It seems she arrived ahead of The Great Flood reaching that region, possibly fleeing it, as said by the Tiwi story, to find a new place for her children and their descendants. The Legend doesn't explain how far she travelled until reaching the islands. The ocean level back then was much lower making travel much more manageable than before The Great Flood. Could Mudungkala have come from North America?

Mudungkala's actions were said to ensure that her children—and by extension, the Tiwi people—would inherit a land capable of supporting life. Her connection to the land, water, and the natural environment symbolizes the intimate relationship between the Tiwi people and their surroundings. After fulfilling her role as the creator, she vanished attempting to return to her home, however the ocean by now was much more dangerous as the levels had risen to waves of enormous size compared to before the flood. She did leave the islands as a living testament to her work.

Mudungkala is not just a mythic figure, she represents the Tiwi people's understanding of ecological change, the value of sustainability, and the interconnectedness of all life forms. Her story has been passed down through oral traditions, becoming a cornerstone of Tiwi cultural identity.

Final Thoughts

The Tiwi creation story, centered on Mudungkala, transcends its role as a local myth and serves as a profound narrative connecting spirituality, ecology, and humanity's shared understanding of transformative natural events. Mudungkala's journey embodies themes of creation, resilience, and sustenance, symbolizing the Tiwi people's intimate relationship with their environment and their awareness of ecological changes.

By drawing parallels between Mudungkala and other mythic figures such as Quetzalcoatl, Thoth, and Huangdi, the story underscores the universal human endeavor to comprehend the natural world and its transformations. These myths, arising from different cultures and continents, reflect a collective recognition of pivotal moments in history, such as the Great Flood, and their impact on civilizations.

The Tiwi people's preservation of Mudungkala's story through oral tradition highlights the enduring power of myth to transmit cultural identity, spiritual values, and ecological wisdom. Mudungkala's legacy is not merely a reflection of the past but a testament to the importance of sustainability and interconnectedness in the present and future. As both a spiritual and ecological narrative, the story continues to inspire reflection on the balance between humanity and the environment, offering valuable lessons for a world facing ongoing environmental challenges.

Literature

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